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Canberra, ACT, Australia

**Submission to the Australian Government Review of Australian Broadcasting Services in the  
Asia Pacific**

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Former Supervising Producer of Radio Australia's Pacific Beat  
and Australia Network television, 2006-'10 and 2013-'17.

This submission may be made public.

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**DISCLAIMER**

I continue to be an employee of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), now in the Regional & Local division as a network-wide Digital Producer. I am not tied on a day-to-day basis to ABC International nor ABC News' output for ABC International – radio's Pacific Beat, TV's The World, nor the World digital desk.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

I'm a former Supervising Producer (SP) of Radio Australia's Pacific Beat program that went out three hours per day – two in the morning and one in the afternoon – during my tenure 2006-'10 and 2013-'17. I oversaw the morning program for much of my tenure.

I was also an occasional SP on Australia Network TV news and the founding Planning Producer on TV's The World across the period. I further spent a great deal of time as a Digital Producer on the World desk of the ABC News website.



## BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE

The issue:

*The Australian Broadcasting Corporation ceased shortwave (SW) broadcasting in the Asia-Pacific region in January 2017 ahead of a transition to FM transmission.*

*The review is assessing the reach of Australia's media in the Asia-Pacific region, including examining whether shortwave radio technology should be used.*

*All media distribution platforms—television, radio and online—are being examined including commercial, community and publicly funded services.*

*The review is also looking at different types of technologies such as analogue, digital and satellite radio and television services and online services.*

I'm not going to spend any time here on the Australia's international television and digital efforts, for the sake of brevity.

Apart from any personal interest, my professional interest in this area was that as a leader of a team of broadcasters and content makers going live-to-air, Radio Australia program makers needed to know where our audience was.

An example of the basic mechanics is that if we wanted to spend resources and manpower chasing an interview effecting East Timor, or the Indonesian border with Papua New Guinea, would the people affected hear it?

Or, as our declining broadcast footprint might not reach those thoroughly worthy communities, were we to instead expend that effort on Solomon Islands? Samoa? Palau? What was our reach there?

The much-lauded Pacific Beat program, supplying three hours of ABC News current affairs rigor Monday to Friday, had perhaps five program makers across the two shifts as I reached the end of my tenure just over 18 months ago. Resources were slim.

Where? is thus a fundamental question that frames a program. It made us tighten the belt and concentrate on what we could achieve within new limitations.

Thus it drove the Pacific Beat team to keep interrogating our management throughout the two phases of the shutdown of shortwave (SW) and whatever promises and 'though bubbles' floated regarding further FM reach into Asia and the Pacific – the focus of this review, *the reach of Australia's media in the Asia-Pacific region*.

## WHERE?



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[Redacted] FM's small footprint paid off, even though it was confined to urban centres with adequate media.

SW technology reached everywhere. SW greatly expanded the where of Pacific Beat's footprint. SW meant program makers could legitimately tackle subjects, in its heyday, that resonated for the whole Pacific and its people from northern Australia to northern Europe and across south-east Asia.

So in 2015 when Asia shortwave was shut down, the Pacific Beat team was obviously eager to know where we now broadcast.



We tried for weeks to get definitive answers to the new footprint following the closure of SW's Brandon and 3-of-6 Shepparton transmitters from the ABC.



The very best example of this was: if we knew the SW footprint 'bled' into West Papua – a place of intense interest and crucial news coverage needs for Melanesians – then we could legitimately devote the resources to covering it.

The total loss of shortwave has simply put Radio Australia at FM points and in the hands of rebroadcasters. Both have problems.

So why does Radio Australia's footprint matter? And how does it affect an aim of this review – *examining whether shortwave radio technology should be used?*

Because Pacific Beat is an agenda-setting, internationally-ranging but village-focused program that has a responsibility to inform, to encourage discussion, to reach out with an always-up, always-on technology to where people are.

Or when FM and phone towers twisted like pretzels in Cyclone Pam, or a coup pulled the plug on local transmitters, that's when people turn to always-on technologies and information from a trusted source.



Picking up the phone with leaders after live-to-air interviews from the north Pacific nations of Northern Marianas, Palau, Tuvalu, Guam – all of which we once had a footprint – they would say "where are you?"



While this statement offers little solutions, I believe this background in framing how Radio Australia and a program such as Pacific Beat needs to know where its audience is and a demonstration of the need to reinstate full Asia Pacific broadcasting to pre-2015 levels.

Adam Connors